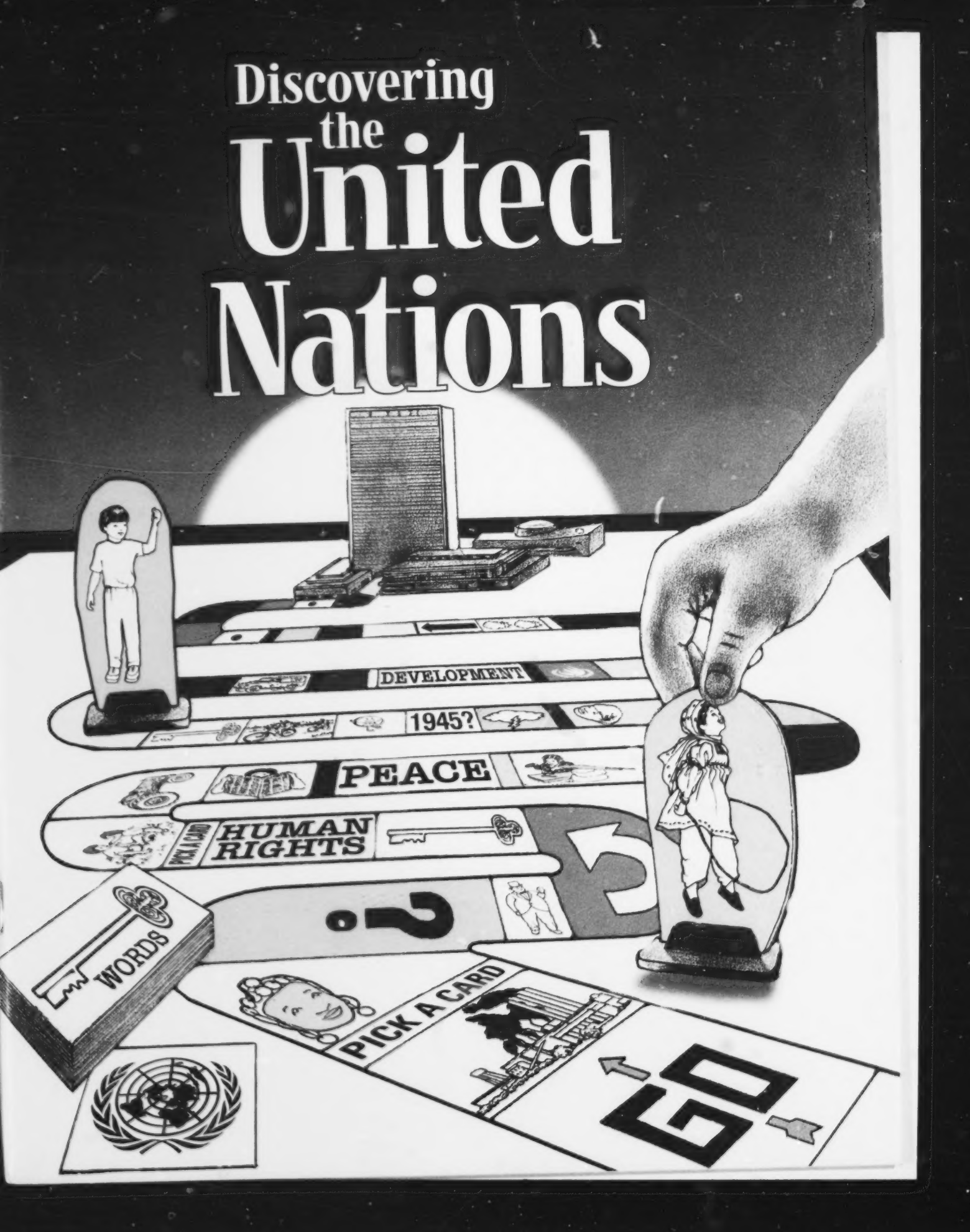
Discovering the United Nations



Discovering the United Nations

Written for the children
of the world

Let's learn about the
United Nations and find out
how we can make
a difference

United Nations
New York, 1998

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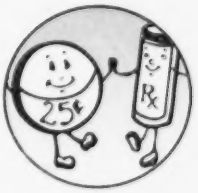

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

A LETTER FROM THE UNITED NATIONS

Dear Children,

What does the name "United Nations" mean to you?

Recently, a group of international students was asked this question during a visit to UN Headquarters in New York. Most of the students said they associated the UN with the idea of peace. Some of them mentioned the "blue helmets" that UN peacekeepers wear while on duty. Others referred to the UN's role to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

But there were several who came up with very different answers.

A child from Angola said, for her/him, the UN was synonymous with clearing mines. After many years of civil war, his/her country had countless landmines strewn all over the place. It also had a very large number of children with amputated limbs due to mine explosions. The United Nations is now helping Angola to clear the mines.

A Palestinian youth, now settled in Jordan, said he was a refugee. All his life he has lived in a refugee camp run by the United Nations. For him, the UN means assistance to refugees.

A young man from India said, for him, the UN meant immunization. His entire village was vaccinated against measles and other diseases with the UN's help.

A girl from the United States said the UN meant lots of fun at Halloween. During this typically American holiday, children of all ages go out knocking on people's doors to collect money for UNICEF and candies. "Last year, my school collected almost $500", she said.

In their own individual ways, each child was right. Beyond what we read in newspapers and what we see on television, the United Nations touches our lives daily in numerous ways. In fact, many people aren't even aware of how the United Nations and its family of organizations are making direct and vital connections with our activities and aspirations.

Here are some examples:

When we make an overseas telephone call or watch the Olympics on television, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of the UN helps make the connection.

When we fly abroad, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) smooths the way by setting global standards for aeroplane and airport safety.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) helps planes pick safe routes through stormy nights.

At dinner time or at school, the food we eat is produced under norms for food additives set by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The World Health Organization (WHO) fights against infectious diseases and works to keep children healthy.

Rules on when young people can start to work and under what conditions are set by another UN organization, the International Labour Organization (ILO).

No matter what it does or where it works, the United Nations helps people all over the world "to live better lives, in safety and dignity".

This book will help you to discover the United Nations and its activities. With true stories from all over the world, it tells you why and how the UN is helping to make our world safer and better.

You, too, can help the UN to live up to its promises. However, in order to do so, you will need to know the UN better. This book will provide a good start.

Kensaku Hogen

Kensaku Hogen

Under-Secretary-General
for Communications and Public Information
United Nations

An Introduction to the United Nations

What is the United Nations?

The United Nations is an organization of independent countries. These countries have joined together to work for world peace and against poverty and injustice. The United Nations was formed on 24 October 1945 with 51 Member countries. Today, the UN has 185 Member countries.

KEY WORDS

charter: a set of guidelines that explains the goals of an organization and lists the rights and duties of each of its members

emblem: a visible symbol of a thing or idea

humanitarian: concerned with the interests of all mankind

forum: an assembly for the discussion of public matters

negotiations: discussions aimed at reaching a settlement on an issue

representative: a person elected to speak and act for others

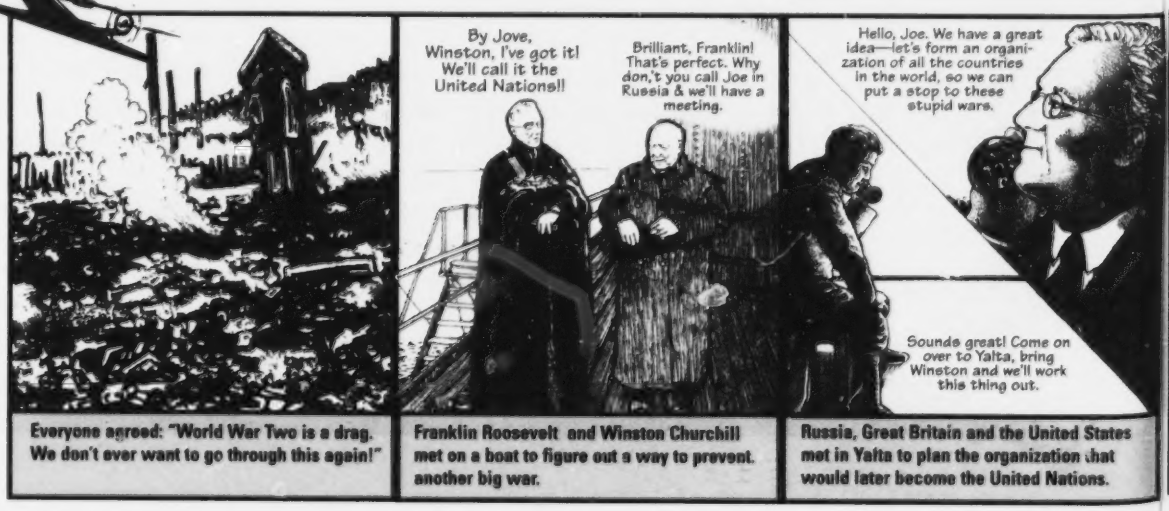
refugee: one who leaves a country or home for safety, food or shelter

repatriate: to return someone to his or her home

How did the United Nations begin?

The idea of creating a world organization to help keep peace was born in the painful days of the Second World War (1939-1945). Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States, and Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, met together in 1941 on board a battleship in the Atlantic Ocean to plan for the establishment of an international organization. Later, they met with Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union (now known as the Russian Federation), at a meeting in Yalta, USSR, in 1945.

A short history of how the United Nations began


By Jove, Winston, I've got it! We'll call it the United Nations!!
Brilliant, Franklin! That's perfect. Why don't you call Joe in Russia & we'll have a meeting.
Hello, Joe. We have a great idea—let's form an organization of all the countries in the world, so we can put a stop to these stupid wars.
Sounds great! Come on over to Yalta, bring Winston and we'll work this thing out.
Everyone agreed: "World War Two is a drag. We don't ever want to go through this again!"
Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met on a boat to figure out a way to prevent another big war.
Russia, Great Britain and the United States met in Yalta to plan the organization that would later become the United Nations.

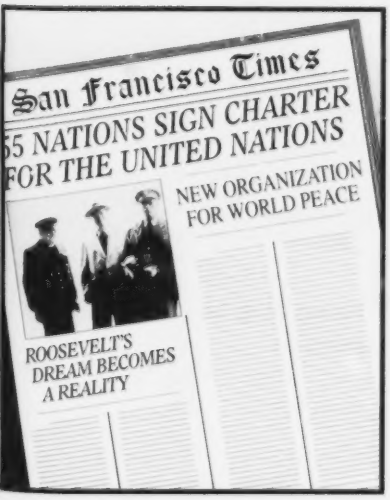
These meetings laid the groundwork for a bigger conference in June 1945 in San Francisco. This conference adopted a Charter for the United Nations, setting out the rules and regulations for the proposed organization. Also at this meeting, the representatives of Governments agreed to use the name "United Nations", suggested by President Roosevelt, who had died a few weeks before the signing of the Charter, as an honour to him.

Finally, on 24 October 1945, when the UN Charter had been officially recognized by the majority of the founding Members of the Organization, the United Nations was born. That is why 24 October — the birthday of the United Nations— is celebrated as United Nations Day throughout the world.

What are the aims and purposes of the UN?

The United Nations has four main purposes:

1. To keep peace throughout the world;
2. To develop friendly relations among nations;
3. To help improve living conditions of poor people and encourage respect for each other's rights and freedoms;
4. To be a centre for helping nations achieve these goals.


San Francisco Times

5 NATIONS SIGN CHARTER FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

NEW ORGANIZATION FOR WORLD PEACE

ROOSEVELT'S DREAM BECOMES A REALITY

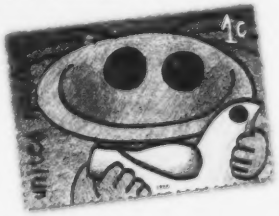
Fifty countries *(and later Poland) signed the UN charter in 1945.*

Where is United Nations Headquarters?

United Nations Headquarters is located in New York City.

You may not believe it, but the site on which the UN now stands was once a rundown area of slaughterhouses, a railroad garage and some old factories. Look at the pictures on the next page. On the left is how the place looked in 1945. And now look to the right. That is how it looks today. The land and buildings of United Nations Headquarters are an international zone. This means that the land does not belong to just one country, the United States, but to all the Members of the United Nations.

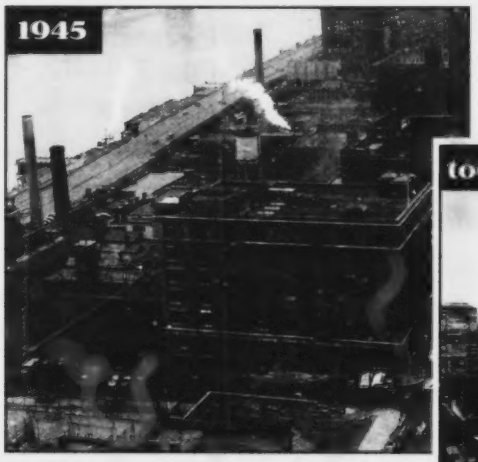
If you visit UN Headquarters on a working day, you may see the flags of all its Members lined up along First Avenue. They stand alphabetically, with Afghanistan at one end and Zimbabwe at the other. The UN also has its own flag. It has a blue background with a white emblem in the center. The emblem has a world map with olive branches around it, signifying world peace. The UN has its own security officers who guard the area. It even has its own post office and issues its own postage stamps. These stamps can be used only from UN Headquarters or from UN offices in Vienna and Geneva.



Artists from all over *the world contribute designs for the United Nations postage stamps. They are very popular with stamp collectors.*

Which languages does the United Nations use?

The UN has six official languages—Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. At any official meeting, a representative may speak in any one of the six languages and his or her words will be translated or interpreted at the same time into the other official languages. Most United Nations documents are also produced in all six official languages. However, work at the UN is generally conducted in two languages—English and French. These are called working languages.



In 1945 the site on which the UN now stands *was a rundown area of slaughterhouses, a railroad garage and some old factories (left). Now that same place is the home of the United Nations.*

YOUR THOUGHTS

- Do you think you have personally been helped by the UN in your daily life? How?
- Name three things that you think the UN does best.
- Why do we need an organization like the United Nations?

Activities in Action

- Write 10 words that you think best describe the work of the United Nations.
- Write a letter or a poem describing how the UN helps others in need. (You can get some hints from the story "The Homecoming" below.)
- Make a United Nations flag to display in your classroom.

UN FACTS

IN 1945, WHEN THE UN WAS FOUNDED, IT HAD 51 MEMBERS. Today, 185 countries are UN Members. Only independent and internationally recognized countries can become UN Members.

THE UN DOES NOT HAVE AN OFFICIAL ANTHEM OR SONG. IN 1970, however, Spain's famous musician Pablo Casals set music to a hymn written in honour of the UN by English poet W. H. Auden. It is called "A Hymn to the United Nations".

24 OCTOBER IS UNITED NATIONS DAY, THE UN'S BIRTHDAY. Other important UN celebrations are:

- International Women's Day (8 March)
- World Environment Day (5 June)
- International Literacy Day (8 September)
- Internationsl Day of Peace (opening day of the regular session of the General Assembly))
- International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October)
- World AIDS Day (1 December)
- Human Rights Day (10 December)

The UN flag has a ***blue*** *background with a white emblem in the centre. The emblem has a world map with olive branches around it.*

THE HOMECOMING

TEV SOEUN REMEMBERS THE DAY QUITE WELL. It was a May morning in 1992. After living in a makeshift refugee camp near the Cambodian border for almost eight years, she boarded a bus to return home. The refugee camp, known only as Site No. 2, had been her only home for those eight years.

Soeun was one of 360,000 Cambodians repatriated as part of a United Nations peace plan. Her country had remained divided for more than 11 years as rival factions fought among themselves. Hundreds of thousands were killed; many more became displaced. In March 1992, after many months of negotiations, the United Nations set up a peace mission for Cambodia.

To achieve its goal, the United Nations had to do more than bring back refugees. It had to help set up various government offices and supervise their work, rebuild roads and bridges that were destroyed during the war and organize an election to choose a new government.

It was a huge task. To meet the challenge, the United Nations organized one of its largest peacekeeping operations. Over 22,000 people, both military and civilian, were brought together from many parts of the world to work for the operation.

One of the biggest challenges was to make sure that people like Soeun could survive. To help them start out, each refugee family received farmland, where available, and some cash. Some people received housing materials to build new homes. Those who were not farmers received cash to start small businesses. Others received job training.

For Soeun, the greatest worry was food. At the refugee camp, the United Nations and others had provided her with food. Who would help her now? Once again it was the United Nations that helped, by establishing feeding centres for the neediest. People also got food in return for work, such as digging ponds, repairing roads and building schools.

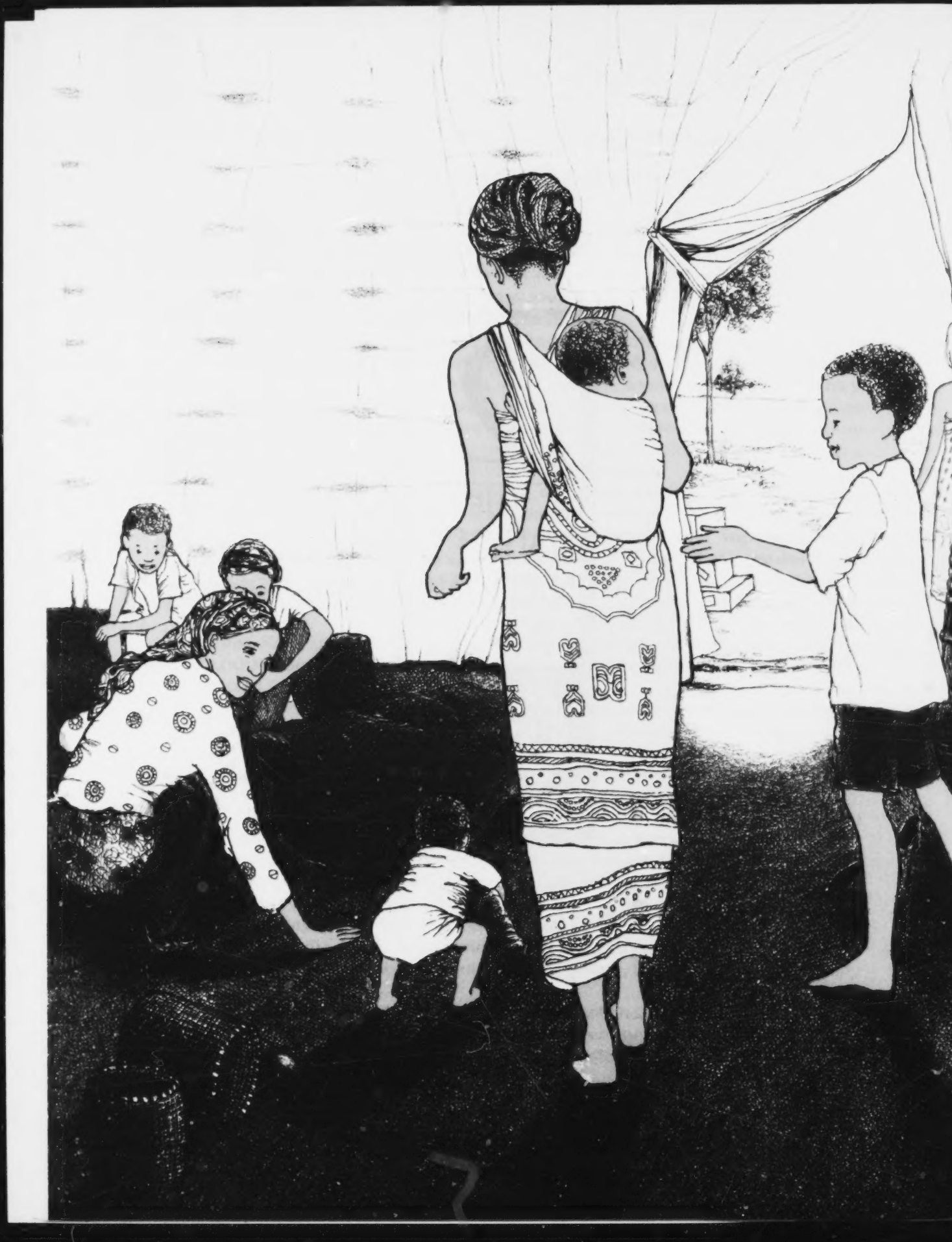
In May 1993, the United Nations organized a national election in Cambodia. It was a free and fair election; more than 90 per cent of the people registered to vote took part. For Soeun, it was her first vote in any election.

Soeun knows that she, like Cambodia itself, has a long and difficult journey before her. The United Nations has given them a fresh start. However, it is now up to them to build on this foundation.

(Based on United Nations materials)

2

THE UNITED NATIONS FAMILY



TRUE STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

A small miracle

MARIANNE SCHARNBERG WORKED FOR THE UNITED Nations in Kenya. She was drawn to Makae Hassan from the very beginning. The 28-year-old Somali mother, together with her five children, had walked some 100 kilometres before she reached a UN camp in Liboi just inside the Kenyan border. When she finally arrived, Makae fell into Marianne's arms.

Marianne had seen many Somali men, women and children leaving their war-torn homes and crossing into Kenya in search of food and shelter. Makae, too, was running from the war. Her husband had been with her at the start of their long journey. But along the way, he was killed by people who also stole the family's camels.

Makae started to get better at the camp but was so sad at losing her home and family that she just wanted to die. Marianne knew she had to do something. Marianne learned that Makae had a sister who had also left Somalia to escape the war. "If only I could bring Makae and her sister back together again, maybe she would feel better", Marianne thought. Once she had learned from other refugees that Makae's sister was making her way to the border, Marianne decided to find her.

With Makae's oldest son, 10-year-old Hassan, Marianne drove 18 kilometres to the border, where several thousand refugees were waiting to cross. "Makae, I want the sister of Makae. Her name is Hararo. Is she here?" Marianne cried out, as she made her way through the crowd of refugees. After shouting only 10 minutes, Marianne saw a woman coming through the crowd—it was Makae's sister, Hararo. Marianne couldn't believe her luck.

Marianne took Hararo and her husband and five children back to the UN camp at Liboi. It was a very special moment when the family gathered around Makae's bed. "Here is your sister", Marianne whispered. "You have a family again. You must live. Please don't die."

It was almost a miracle. Marianne had found her sister and joined her family together again, giving Makae hope for a new life and a new future. Makae became well again.

(Based on United Nations materials)

The United Nations Family

What are the main parts of the United Nations?

The United Nations has six organs or main parts. These are:

- The General Assembly
- The Security Council
- The Economic and Social Council
- The Trusteeship Council
- The International Court of Justice
- The Secretariat

These organs are based at United Nations Headquarters in New York, except for the International Court of Justice, which is located at The Hague, Netherlands.

KEY WORDS

specialized agency: a United Nations body or office providing a particular public service

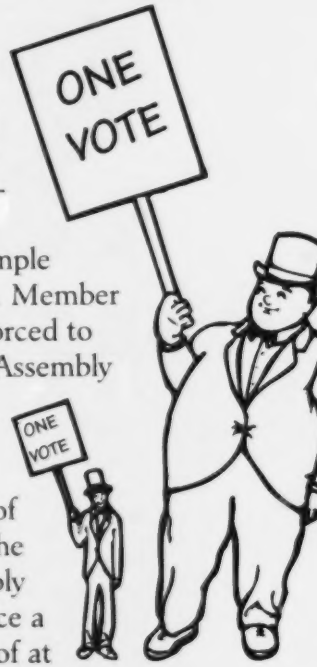
delegation: a group of people who act for or represent a country or organization; usually headed by an ambassador

resolution: a decision adopted by a group of people or countries on a particular issue

judgement: a decision, award, or sentence, as of a court of law

What is the role of the General Assembly?

The General Assembly is the main body of the United Nations. Here, all the Members of the United Nations meet to discuss and make suggestions on any subject they consider important. Decisions on all important questions require a two-thirds majority; on other matters, a simple majority is enough. Member States cannot be forced to carry out General Assembly resolutions, but those resolutions do represent the collective opinion of countries around the world. The Assembly meets regularly once a year, for a period of at least three months. Emergency meetings may be called at any time.



In the General Assembly, each Member has one vote. This rule applies to all nations, large and small. For example, China has over a billion people. It has one vote. Palau, the smallest UN Member country, has only 17,000 people. It, too, has one vote.

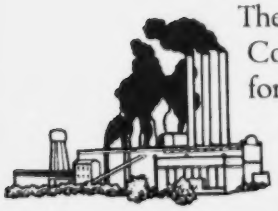
What is the role of the Security Council?

While the General Assembly can discuss any world issue, the Security Council deals only with questions of war and peace. All the UN Members have agreed to accept the decisions of the Security Council and to carry them out.

The Security Council has fifteen members. Five of these countries are permanent members. They are: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. The other ten non-permanent members are elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms and are chosen based on the region of the world they come from. The Security Council can meet any time of the year, day or night, whenever there is a need.

Voting in the Security Council is different from voting in the General Assembly. To pass an important resolution, nine members of the Council must vote "yes", but if any of the five permanent members votes "no", it is called a veto and the resolution does not pass.

What is the role of the Economic and Social Council?

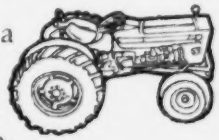


The Economic and Social Council is called ECOSOC for short. It is concerned with economic problems, such as poverty, trade, environment and industrialization. The Council is also concerned with social issues, such as population, the condition of women and children, housing, racial discrimination, crime, youth, and food. ECOSOC makes suggestions on how to improve education and health conditions and to encourage respect for the rights and freedoms of human beings everywhere.

There are 54 member countries in ECOSOC. All are elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms. The Council normally holds one session a year, and its decisions are made by a majority vote.

The UN devotes 80 per cent of its resources to help poorer countries.

The ECOSOC works with many commissions, specialized agencies and programmes that help in carrying out specific projects. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is a specialized agency. It helps countries to improve their food production. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a programme set up to help children everywhere. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) is another programme; it helps poor countries to fight against poverty and hunger.



What is the role of the Trusteeship Council?

When the UN began, there were some parts of the world where the people were not free to form their own Governments. A number of these areas were placed under special UN protection and were called Trust Territories. The Trusteeship Council was established as a part of the UN to help the people who lived in these Trust Territories to choose their own form of government. Today, all Trust Territories have either become independent or joined with other independent countries. As a result, the Trusteeship Council no longer meets on a regular basis.

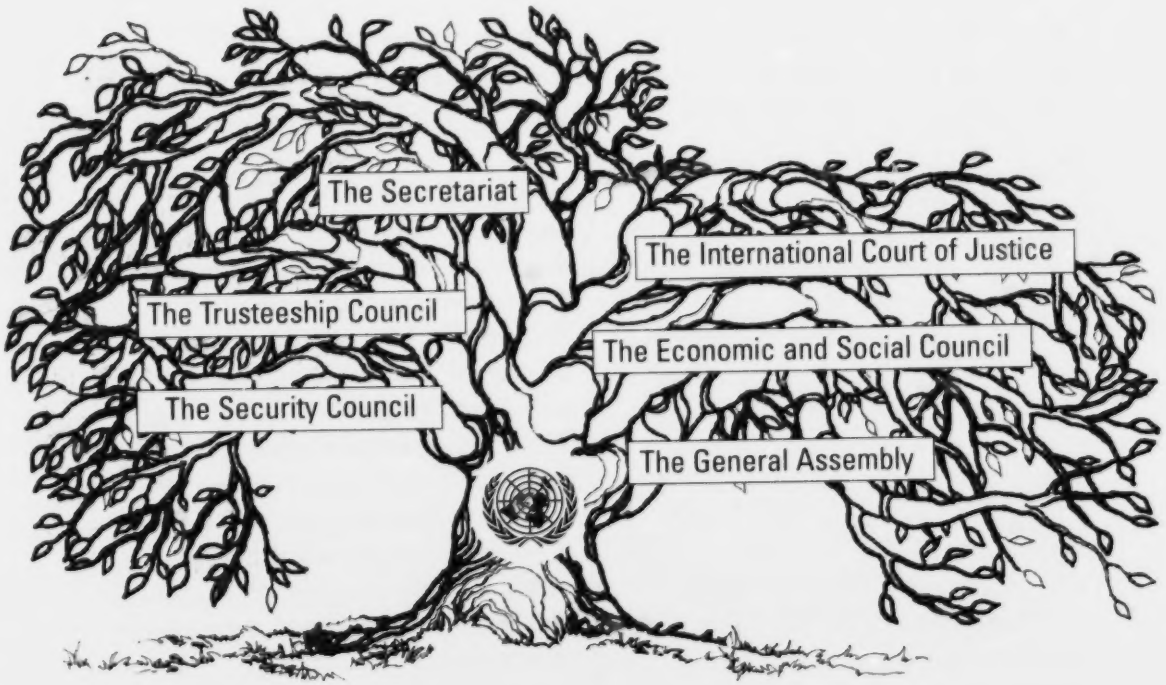
What is the role of the International Court of Justice?

The International Court of Justice is in fact a court; it hears complaints and gives its judgement. However, there is a difference. Unlike a normal court, only countries, not individuals, can take cases before the International Court of Justice. Once a country agrees to let the Court review a case, it must promise to obey the Court's decision. The Court sits at The Hague, Netherlands, and is always in session. It has 15 Judges who are elected by the General Assembly and the Security Council. No two Judges can come from the same country. Nine Judges have to agree before a decision can be made.

Kofi Annan, from Ghana, is the current Secretary-General of the United Nations.

What is the UN Secretariat?

People who work for the UN at its Headquarters in New York and all over the world form the UN Secretariat. At its head is the Secretary-General. He is assisted by all the members of the Secretariat who carry out the day-to-day work of the UN. The Secretariat includes researchers, legal and political experts, editors, economists and others who carry out research, write reports and prepare information for other parts of the UN. These people, who work not for the country they come from but for all the UN Member States, are known as international civil servants.



YOUR THOUGHTS

- What part of the UN helped Makae and her family?
- Where did the money come from to help Makae and her family? (Hint: read **UN FACTS** below.)
- If you were Hassan, Makae's 10-year-old son, what would you want the UN to do for you?

Activities in Action

- Make a diagram to show how all the parts of the UN are related.
- The UN spends about $4.5 billion a year to help poor countries. Make a book with ideas and suggestions for ways you believe the UN should spend this money.
- Contact a homeless shelter in your area. Find out what you can do to help those in need.

The General Assembly, where every nation can speak up and be heard on any matter.

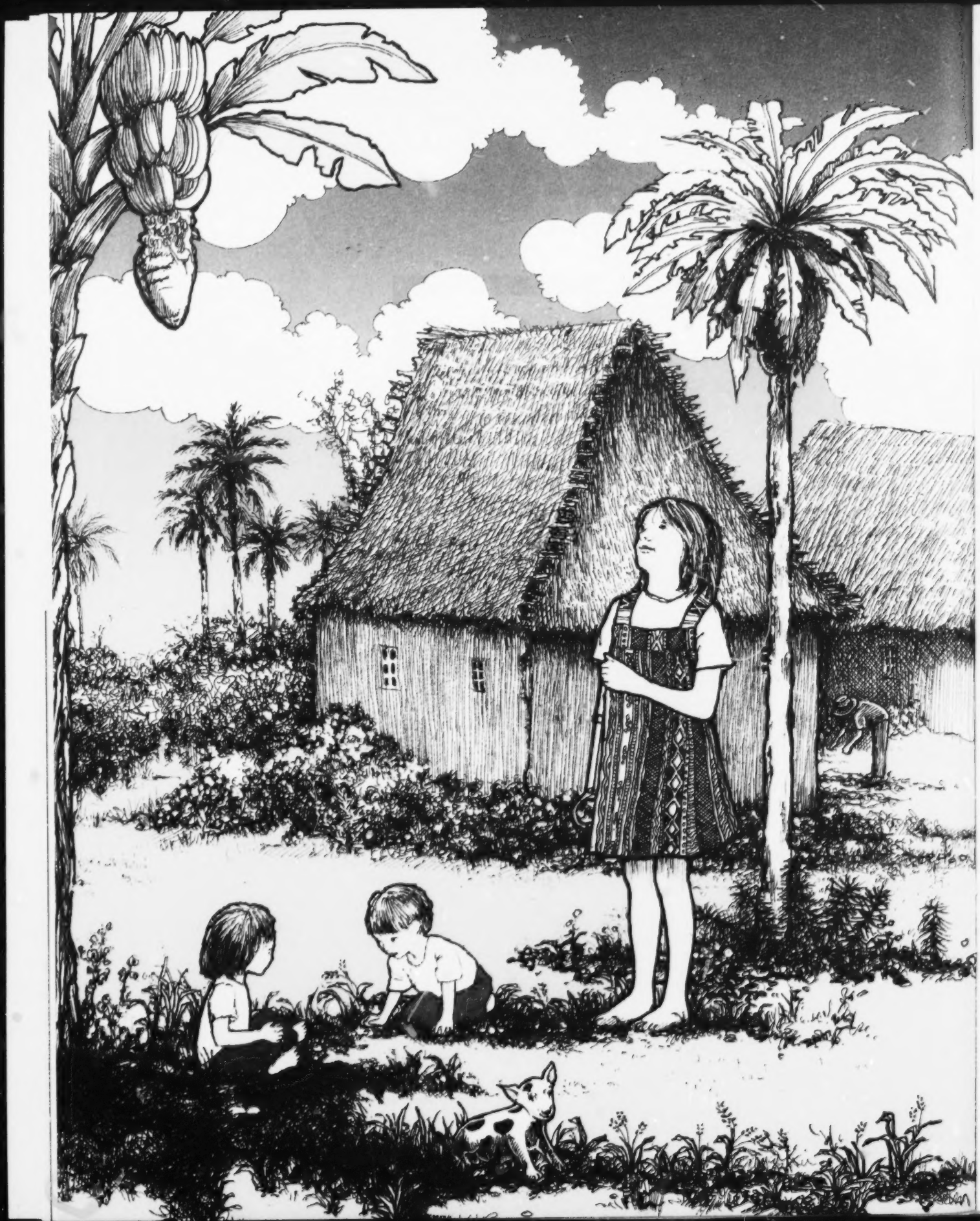
UN FACTS

THE MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE UN, ALL 185 OF THEM, PAY FOR everything that the UN does. It has no other source of income.

IN 1945, HALF THE WORLD'S PEOPLE LIVED IN COUNTRIES THAT WERE controlled by outsiders. These countries, known as colonies, were ruled by a handful of major Powers, including Great Britain, France, Spain and Portugal. The UN has helped more than 80 former colonies to become free. Today, only 1.5 million people live in dependent territories.

3

WHAT THE UNITED NATIONS DOES FOR PEACE



Arms for arms

ELBA GARCIA THINKS SHE IS A VERY LUCKY PERSON. A few years ago, while selling goods inside Honduras along the border with Nicaragua, she was shot when caught in the crossfire between the Nicaraguan Government and rebel forces, and lost an arm. Later she went home with a gift: an artificial arm.

Artificial limbs are not uncommon. In Honduras, the World Rehabilitation Clinic has provided hundreds of people with artificial limbs. But the arm with which Elba was fitted was not an ordinary one: it was made from pieces of weapons collected from rebel soldiers who were disarmed by UN peacekeepers.

The UN Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA), which was set up in November 1989, was responsible for seeing that thousands of Nicaraguan rebels were disarmed. Once the disarmament was complete, ONUCA was left with a mountain of weapons. It decided to donate ten tons of the old weapons to the World Rehabilitation Clinic in Honduras. The clinic used them for creating artificial limbs. Elba was one of the first recipients.

A rod from an AK47 assault rifle was carefully reshaped to become the hooks for Elba's arm. She had to learn how to use the artificial arm by going to physical therapy for many weeks.

In the end, she was very happy. "I can't help thinking that the rifle that wounded me also changed my life and gave me my new hand", Elba says.

(Based on UN materials)

What the United Nations Does for Peace

How does the UN work for peace?

The UN serves as a global forum where countries can raise and discuss the most difficult issues, including problems of war and peace.

KEY WORDS

disarm: take away weapons

dialogue: conversation between two or more persons

ceasefire: a stopping of military action or fighting

intervene: to come between things, persons, or events

embargo: a restraint or stopping of commerce or shipping by government order

multinational: from many countries

When government leaders and their opponents face each other and talk, a dialogue is established. Many times, this leads to a peaceful settlement of disputes. The Secretary-General, either by himself or through a representative, often initiates such a dialogue.

When these efforts fail, the UN can use other means. For example, the General Assembly can call upon the countries concerned to ease the dispute. When many countries speak with one voice, as they do at the UN, Governments feel the pressure to listen. If this, too, fails to end the dispute, the Security Council steps in. Its decisions, which can range from calling a ceasefire to placing economic and military sanctions against a country, are compulsory. When a ceasefire is achieved, the Security Council may set up a peacekeeping operation to observe the ceasefire and help work out the peaceful settlement of disputes.

What is a peacekeeping operation?

Peacekeeping is the use of multinational forces, under UN command, to help solve problems between countries or communities.

Peacekeeping forces can be set up only when the countries or communities who are fighting agree and when the Security Council supports the idea.

You can compare peacekeeping with the job of a nurse at a hospital. When you go to a hospital for a surgical operation, the nurse takes your temperature and gives you medication to provide immediate relief. She will also do some other tests to make sure that your condition does not get worse. Finally, when you are ready, the surgeon will

arrive to deal with your problem. The peacekeepers, like hospital nurses, help to bring a situation under control. If the armies of opposing camps stay put, the UN invites the leaders to discuss peace proposals.

The UN does not have an army or military force. Police and military forces that the UN uses are contributed by Member countries. Weapons and heavy equipment also come from Member countries. UN peacekeepers are often called "blue helmets", because the soldiers, who carry light weapons for self-defence, wear blue helmets. UN observers, who carry no arms, wear blue berets.

In the past, peacekeepers were involved mainly in keeping peace between countries that were at war. But now many nations are at war with themselves. In such situations, the UN is often asked to discuss and help work out a settlement between the disputing groups and to provide emergency humanitarian relief to the people affected by the war.

What happens when a country does not follow a UN decision?

In such a situation, the UN may take several actions. First, the matter may be referred to the International Court of Justice for an opinion. Second, should a country threaten or break the peace or act in a violent way, economic and other sanctions may be placed on the country. The Security Council can allow force to be used in certain instances, but these measures are usually used only after all peaceful means have failed. For example, in 1990, after Iraq had invaded Kuwait and refused to leave the territory, the Security Council authorized Member States to use "all necessary means" to obtain Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait.

What else does the UN do for peace?

Keeping peace is not the only thing the UN does. During and after a military conflict, the UN helps refugees or displaced people to return home. It clears landmines, repairs roads and bridges and provides economic and technical help to rebuild the economy. It also monitors elections and checks how a country respects the human rights of its citizens. This process, known as peace-building, has helped over 60 countries to build democratic governments.

The UN also works towards disarmament by encouraging countries to reduce the size of their armed forces. Some peacekeeping operations have even taken apart and destroyed weapons.

In 1988, the UN peacekeeping force *was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It was the sixth time the UN had received the Prize.*

YOUR THOUGHTS

- Why does Elba Garcia think she is a lucky person? Do you think she is lucky?
- What else besides artificial limbs could be made out of old weapons?
- What other services do you think the UN peacekeepers can offer to war-torn countries?

Activities in Action

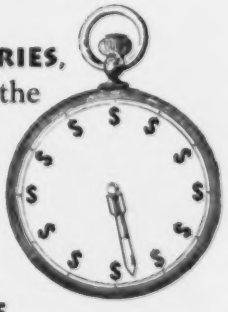
- List three differences between "soldiers for peace" (as the peacekeepers have been called) and regular soldiers.
- In small groups, discuss a disagreement or argument you have had. Then take turns assigning someone, a one-person peacekeeping force, to look at the argument and suggest ways it could have been avoided or resolved.
- Write a speech on why countries should disarm and make their armed forces smaller, and present it to your class.

UN FACTS

BETWEEN 1948 AND 1998, THE UN HAS CARRIED OUT 48 PEACEkeeping operations. More than 750,000 military personnel and civilian police have served with the UN forces, and more than 1,500 peacekeepers have lost their lives. Many thousands of civilians have also served.

The total cost of all UN peacekeeping operations in 1997 was $1.3 billion. This is less than 0.2 per cent of what the world spends on its military every year.

THE UN HAS HELPED SECURE PEACE IN MANY COUNTRIES, including Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique and the former Yugoslavia.



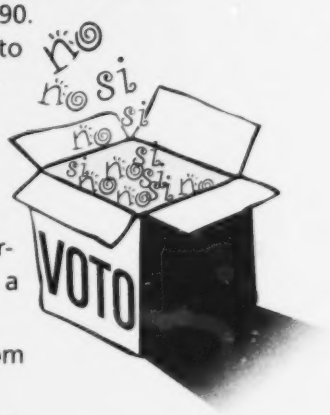
THE WORLD SPENDS ALMOST $800 BILLION EVERY YEAR TO purchase arms and maintain armies. This equals $1 million a minute.

LANDMINES, BURIED IN SOME 70 COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE, kill over 10,000 people every year. It costs only $3 to $10 to buy one landmine, but it costs $300 to $1,000 to remove one.

MONITORING ELECTIONS IN NICARAGUA

FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS help the people of a country to elect a government they want. The United Nations often sends people to monitor elections and ensure their fairness. This, in turn, helps build people's rule or democracy.

As a UN TV producer, Steve Whitehouse had covered many UN operations, but none like covering the elections in Nicaragua in 1990. After years of civil war, Nicaragua invited the UN observers to monitor and supervise the elections there. Such a supervision was necessary to make sure that everyone accepted the election results.



What did UN election monitors do in Nicaragua? This is what Steve listed:

- Radioing in vote counts at midnight from a four-wheel-drive vehicle parked halfway up the side of a volcano;
- Spending the night in sleeping bags on school-room floors in remote communities;
- Holding flashlights when the power fails so vote count can continue in a polling station.

"These are just three things among many that our team of election observers found themselves doing during their historic stay in Nicaragua," said Steve.

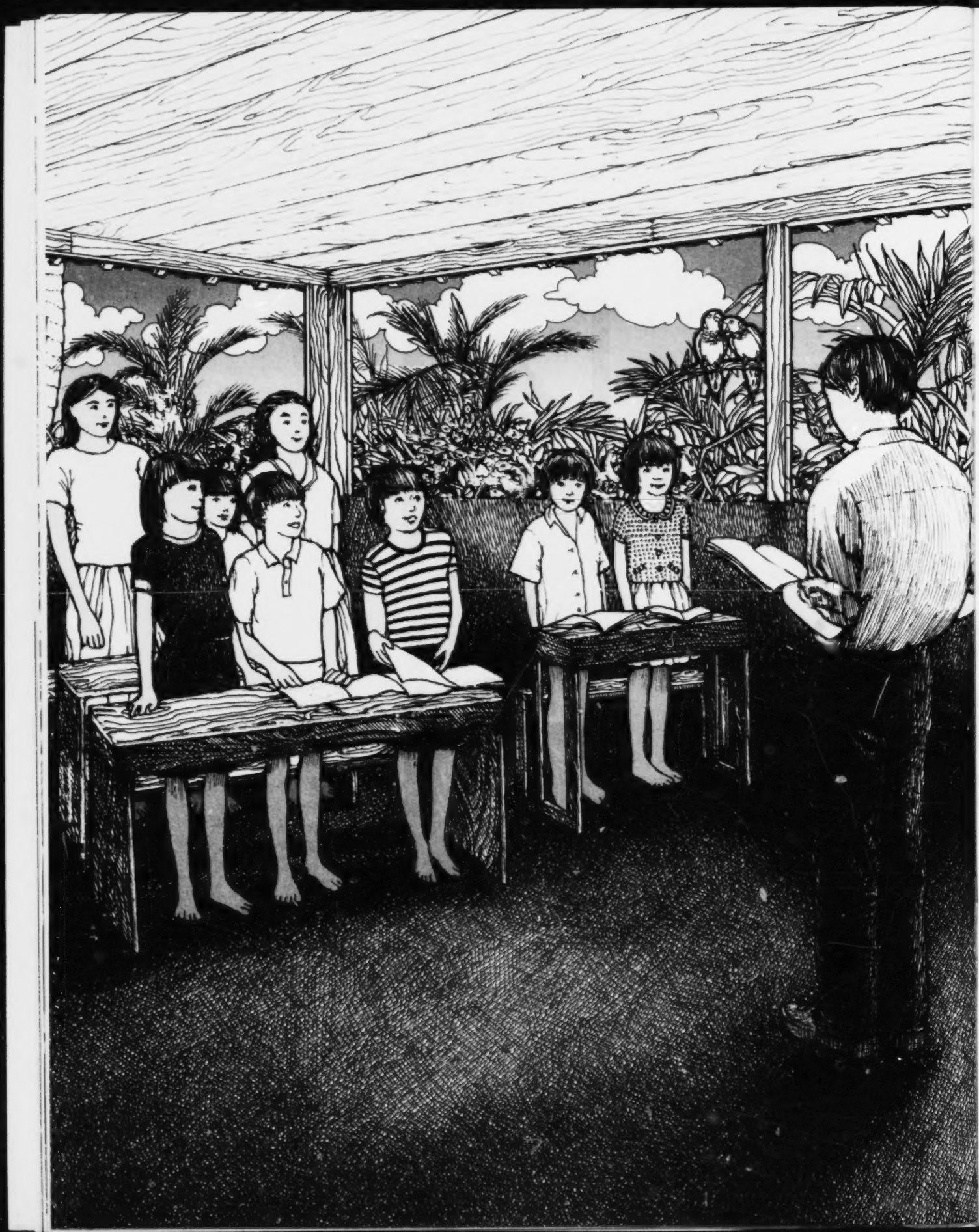
On election day, the UN obserevers were up before dawn in order to be in place before polls opened. They found long lines of Nicaraguans already waiting to vote. At the close of voting, the UN teams went to selected polling stations to monitor the vote count. Thanks to the UN presence, there was very little violence. When the results were announced — victory for the opposition — everybody accepted the outcome.

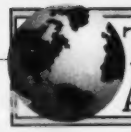
It was also a victory for the people of Nicaragua. After years of violence, they were now placed on a new course towards peace.

(Based on UN materials)

4

WHAT THE UNITED NATIONS DOES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS





TRUE STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

The right to education

AMERICAN INDIANS ARE AMONG THE WORLD'S OLDEST peoples. They are also among those whose human rights are not always fully respected. Here is an example of how the UN helped a group of Indians win back some rights.

Guarani Indians live in Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. A few years ago, the leaders of Bolivia's Guaranis sent a letter to the UN. "Many years ago", the letter said, "when schools arrived in our region, they told us that education would be the way out of our backwardness. We built school buildings with whatever little resources we had and made the Government send teachers. But the years went by, and we did not see the fruits of these schools."

Education in the schools was all in the Spanish language. The Government thought Spanish was more advanced than the Indian languages and that the Indians should learn it. Unfortunately, instead of helping them advance, education did the opposite. Many teachers told the Guarani children, who were unable to cope with a new language, that they were stupid and backward. As a result, children felt discouraged.

In 1989, two UN agencies, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), moved to change that situation. Their representatives met with the Guarani people and Bolivian officials. With the help of a number of other local and international organizations, they started a new school programme to give the Guarani children a chance to learn two languages, Guarani and Spanish.

The initiative paid off. Early results showed that Guarani children in bilingual schools got higher grades in all subjects than students in single-language schools. As a result, fewer children left school before finishing.

The Guarani people are more hopeful now. As one parent wrote to the UN, "Our children now learn more and better. At last they can express themselves freely without being punished for speaking their own language."

(Adapted from the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, DPI/1374)

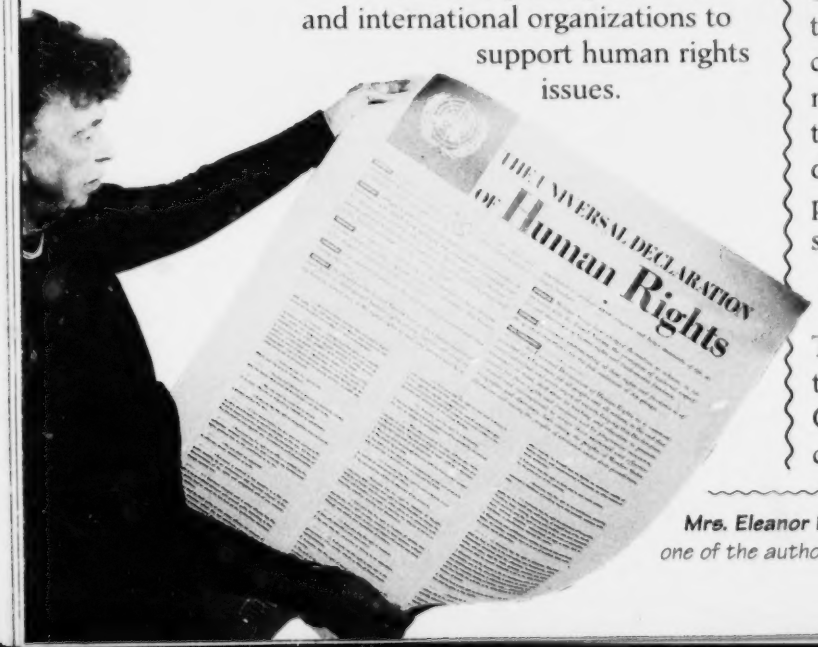
What the United Nations Does for Human Rights

What are human rights?

Human rights are those rights which are essential for us to live as human beings. Everyone has a right to a decent and full life. This means that every person deserves a fair chance to grow and develop his or her abilities beyond what is required for survival and basic needs.

Human rights for children include a safe environment, education, time for leisure, health care and the opportunity to participate in social, economic, cultural and political life. In your daily life, you can support human rights by treating your fellow human beings with the respect they deserve.

You can also participate in local and international organizations to support human rights issues.



Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, *former United States First Lady, was one of the authors of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

In 1948, the UN adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document set standards for all nations, aimed at protecting the individual citizen from abuse. The Declaration states that human rights are "the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

The Declaration is not a law. It only recommends to nations what they should do. But two international conventions, or treaties, one on economic, cultural and social rights and the other on civil and political rights, do bind countries to honour their pledges. The UN has also adopted several other human rights treaties. The countries that sign these treaties agree to follow them. These countries also give the UN the right to check on whether or not Governments are observing their citizens' human rights.

KEY WORDS

displaced: driven from home by war
indigenous people: local or native people, considered to be among the oldest peoples on earth
minor: under legal age
nationality: country or nation of origin
standard: a basis of measure or comparison
violation: breaking of a law, rule or promise; failure to observe

Do children have special protection from human rights violations?

Children basically have the same rights as adults. However, because they are minors, they need special protection. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international agreement — or Convention - adopted by the UN General Assembly in November 1989.

The Convention's 54 articles state the individual rights of any person under 18 years of age to develop his or her full life, free from hunger and want, neglect and other abuses. The Convention gives specific guidelines for the countries of the world to improve the lives of children everywhere. However, it is up to individual countries and people around the world to take positive steps toward children's rights wherever they may be.

The right to life is the most basic human right. Every child has the right to live and grow up in a healthy, peaceful environment and to become a useful member of society. Unfortunately, thousands of children die every year for many reasons: poverty, disease, war and abuse.

Every child has the right to a name and a nationality from birth. There are countries where written records of births and deaths are not kept up by recordkeepers. Often refugees and children from native populations are not registered. Sometimes children are treated as things to be bought or sold. If a child does not have a name or identity, this can lead to discrimination or slavery.

Tens of thousands of children have been forced to participate as soldiers. Most are adolescent boys, but many are girls.

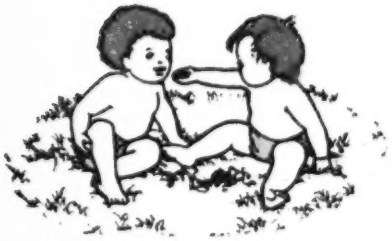
Does the UN protect children during war?

Before 1945, most victims of war were soldiers. Since then, more than 150 wars have been fought. At least 20 million people have died and another 60 million have been wounded in these wars. Some reports say that at least 80 per cent of them were not soldiers. In fact, most of them were women and children.

Children are also being used to fight wars. It is estimated that over 200,000 children under the age of 15 have been either asked or told to fight in armed forces. The Convention on the Rights of the Child tries to outlaw the use of children in war. It calls on countries to make sure that children under 15 years of age do not take part in war. Countries must also respect the laws that provide special protection and relief to children and their mothers during war.

YOUR THOUGHTS

- Why did the Guarani Indians want to study in their own language?
- Do you think education is a human right?
- How do you think human rights can be protected and promoted?
- What can we do to protect children everywhere? In your community?



Activities in Action

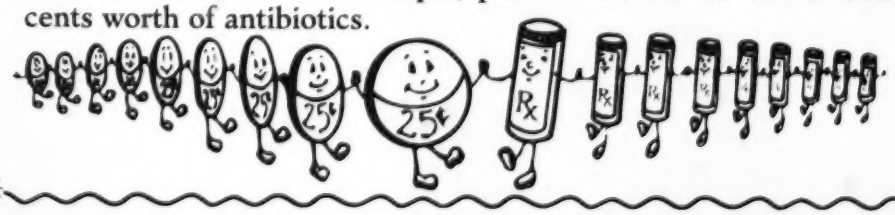
- Join with class members to draft a "code of conduct" for your class (behaviour which would make class members feel respected, safe, welcome, free to participate fully, etc.). Compare your code of conduct with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Make and colour a poster on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Keep a journal and write your ideas about how to protect children in the world. Send it to your President or UN representative.

UN FACTS

IN 1997, OVER 22 MILLION PEOPLE WERE REFUGEES OR DISPLACED persons. War, political trouble, civil unrest and ethnic hatred forced them to run away from their own countries and become refugees in a foreign land. The UN provides food, emergency medical help and safe shelter to refugees.

EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD, GIRLS FACE DISCRIMINATION. They often receive less food than boys do, and in many countries they work long hours even when they are only 5 or 6 years old. Eighty million girls aged 6 to 11 do not go to school. The Convention on the Rights of the Child asks Governments to spend more money to educate girls.

THE TOP THREE KILLERS OF CHILDREN ARE PNEUMONIA (3.5 MIL-lion each year), diarrhoea (3 million each year) and measles (1 million each year). Each of these diseases can be prevented using simple, low-cost methods. For example, pneumonia can be cured with 25 cents worth of antibiotics.



FRIENDS IN NEED ARE FRIENDS INDEED

THE LITTLE AFGHAN GIRL said she had never owned a toy in her life. Now she was happily skipping rope for the first time. Other Afghan refugee children excitedly unwrapped presents containing inexpensive pencils, crayons and notebooks. Girls wove ribbons through their hair and proudly wore them for weeks.

These gifts for Afghanistan's refugee children came from Japan. A few years ago, the UN and the World Association of Girl Guides launched a "peace pack" programme. In response, girls in 52 countries have collected more than 260,000 packs for refugee children around the world. The Girl Guides in Japan decided to collect gifts for Afghan children. In 1996, more than 50,000 Japanese girls collected 13,536 packages. Later, six of them flew to Peshawar, Pakistan, where the refugee families live, and distributed the packs.

As the girls handed out their gift packs, the children became the focus of everyone's attention. One teacher, who watched the normally shy children burst into song, said that the value of these packs was impossible to measure. They may have cost very little, but the gifts were the most precious objects these children had ever owned.

(Adapted from Refugees *magazine, published by UNHCR)*

5

WHAT THE UNITED NATIONS DOES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

TRUE STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Together against the desert

THE STUDENTS AT A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN THE SMALL town of Yako, Burkina Faso, Africa, are in a happy mood, carrying pickaxes, spades and ropes.

The school is the site of a camp organized by Burkina Faso's Federation of UNESCO Clubs and Associations. The students are taking part in an international tree-planting operation. After many years of drought and abuse, the land in Burkina Faso and other countries of the Sahel region in Africa is dry. Deserts are quickly expanding. Trees can help to stop or slow down their growth.

UNESCO Clubs in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Senegal, supported by several countries in the region, have begun action to stop the spread of deserts. This eight-day reforestation camp at Yako has brought together more than 500 young people, some of them from as far away as Belgium, France and Germany.

The young people share the same living space, learn about each other and make lasting friendships. Everyone is excited in the camp, but the young people have not lost sight of the main reason for being there. In groups of two, three and four, they plant seedlings which have been provided under a project funded by Canada. Called "neem" or "Indian lilac", the seedlings require little water and stand up very well to heat. These trees can be used for firewood and lumber.

"This is the first time I've felt that I'm doing something useful", says Catherine, a student from Belgium. "I want to give of myself because there is much to be done here." Everyone else in the group shares Catherine's excitement. Timothee, from Burkina Faso, thinks the experience has changed him. "I feel like I've really grown up through living in a community which offers many opportunities for cultural exchanges."

Once the camp at Yako ends, the group will move to Togo, where they will work on a similar project. They have so much to offer, but there is still so much left to do.

(Adapted from UNESCO sources)

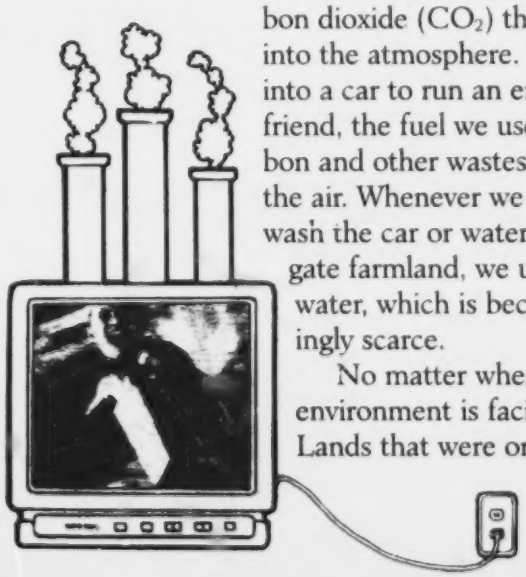
What the United Nations Does for the Environment

What is "environment"? How is it related to "development"?

The environment is where we live. It is the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil that grows our crops and gives us minerals; it is all the living things around us. Development is what we do with these resources to improve our lives. All over the world we do things that we believe will make our lives better, but everything we do changes our environment.

Rich countries consume about 75 per cent of all energy, including oil, gas and coal, used in the world.

For example, every time we turn on a light, use a washing machine or listen to music on a stereo in a country that produces power by burning coal or oil, we add to the amount of carbon dioxide (CO_2) that is released into the atmosphere. When we jump into a car to run an errand or visit a friend, the fuel we use also emits carbon and other wastes which pollute the air. Whenever we turn on a tap to wash the car or water the lawn or irrigate farmland, we use up fresh water, which is becoming increasingly scarce.



No matter where we live, the environment is facing a crisis. Lands that were once green are turning into deserts. Forests are disappearing, and the pollution of water and air is threatening all nations. If we want the environment to provide us with these resources, we need to protect it from damage.

KEY WORDS

reforestation: planting new trees on land that was once a forest

raw materials: substances from which manufactured goods are made

industries: manufacturing and business

generation: the average age difference between parent and child, usually 30 years

developing country: a country that is starting to grow or advance

What is the UN doing to help protect our environment?

The UN is bringing nations together to work towards "sustainable development". This means that development should meet our present needs without hurting the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In 1972, the UN created the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to promote environmental action and awareness worldwide. It has also helped adopt several international agreements on how nations should deal with our environment.

In 1992, the UN held the Conference on Environment and Development, or the *Earth Summit*, as

it came to be known. The conference adopted *Agenda 21*, a plan of action stating what the most important steps that need to be taken are to achieve sustainable development. Over 1,800 cities and towns worldwide have now adopted their own local Agenda 21. In recent years, the UN has helped negotiate international agreements to reduce emissions and of harmful gases.

The UN has also set up a Commission on Sustainable Development to monitor how Governments are carrying out the agreements reached in *Agenda 21*.

Does the UN fight against poverty? How?

One of the main goals of the UN is to help poor people live better lives and to eliminate disease and illiteracy. The UN does several things to achieve this goal.

First of all, the UN encourages rich countries to help poorer countries in their fight against poverty. Rich countries can do this by providing money and technical assistance. They can also make it easier for poorer countries to trade with them.

Secondly, the UN itself provides direct assistance. In fact, almost 80 per cent of the UN's resources are used to help poor countries build roads and bridges, set up schools and factories, fight diseases and obtain fresh water.

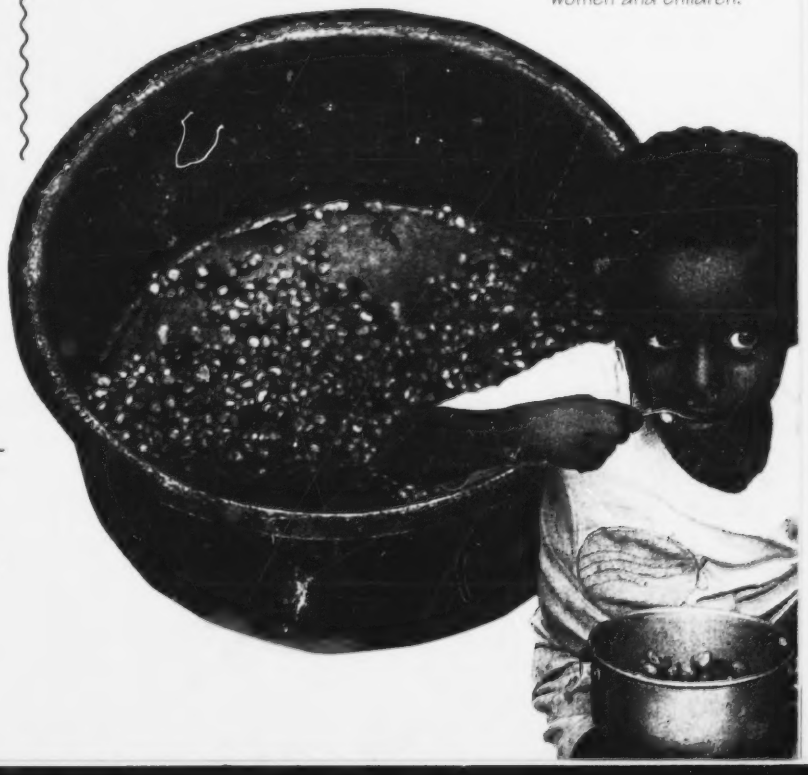
In 1995, the UN held a world conference for social development in Copenhagen, where 117 heads of State or Government agreed to work together to end poverty.

Has the UN been successful in its fight against poverty?

The world still has too many poor people. Every sixth person on earth makes less than $1 a day. Many of them don't have shelter, enough food or fresh water. The UN is helping countries to end poverty by creating new jobs and increasing income through exports. It also raises money to give small loans to the poor to start a business or build a new home.

There are other ways in which the UN fights against poverty. It has helped end smallpox, a deadly disease; it is now leading a global campaign to find a cure for AIDS, another deadly disease. The UN also helps people get access to fresh drinking water and immunize children. Each time there is a flood or an earthquake, the UN sends immediate emergency help. Refugees who flee their homes to escape a war also find shelter with the UN.

There are over 800 million hungry people in the world, most of them women and children.



Do people in rich countries also benefit from the UN's work?

Of course they do. Maintaining peace is the UN's most important job. When there is peace, everyone is a winner. Similarly, everyone gains from the UN's work to protect the environment.

The UN's work also benefits each of us individually no matter where we live. For example, thanks to the rules and regulations worked out by the UN, travelling by plane is safer today. Sending and receiving letters has become easier. Forecasting the weather is also more accurate. Another area where the UN benefits us all, especially students and researchers, is statistics. The UN provides the most dependable statistics available on population, health, food and other areas of human activity.

YOUR THOUGHTS

- Why do you think the children in the story felt so strongly about planting a new forest? Could you do that in your community?
- If a family is poor and needs wood for fire and cooking, they might cut down any trees they can find, even though this could damage the environment. What can be done about this?
- Can each of us do something about ending poverty in our own communities and outside? Give some examples.

Activities in Action

- Keep a daily list of things you can reuse, such as bags or bottles. Write down what these things were used for to begin with and what you reused them for. See if by the end of one month you can increase the number of reusable objects and their uses.
- Write a letter to the Mayor of your city or the headman of your village telling him or her about your feelings about the local environment and what you think can be done to solve the problems.
- Set up a UN Club in your school. Invite your friends to join in raising funds for children of a particular country, for example, displaced children in Rwanda.

UN FACTS

MORE THAN 70 PER CENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION IS WITHOUT clean water. Almost 25,000 people die each day because their water is polluted. In 1980, the UN started a programme to bring fresh water to the world's poorest. So far this programme has brought safe drinking water to over 1.3 billion people.

THE UN WANTS EVERY CHILD TO BE IMMUNIZED AGAINST SIX DEAD- ly diseases: diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, polio, tuberculosis and tetanus. As a result of the UN's efforts, the lives of over 3 million children are now saved every year.

More and more girls now go to school. The UN believes spending more for girls' education is a good investment for a country's future.

NEARLY ONE BILLION PEOPLE—OR ONE IN EVERY SIX PERSONS—IN the world cannot read or write. Almost all of these people live in developing (or poorer) countries. If these countries would spend on education only 4 per cent of what they spend on their military, adult illiteracy could be reduced by half.

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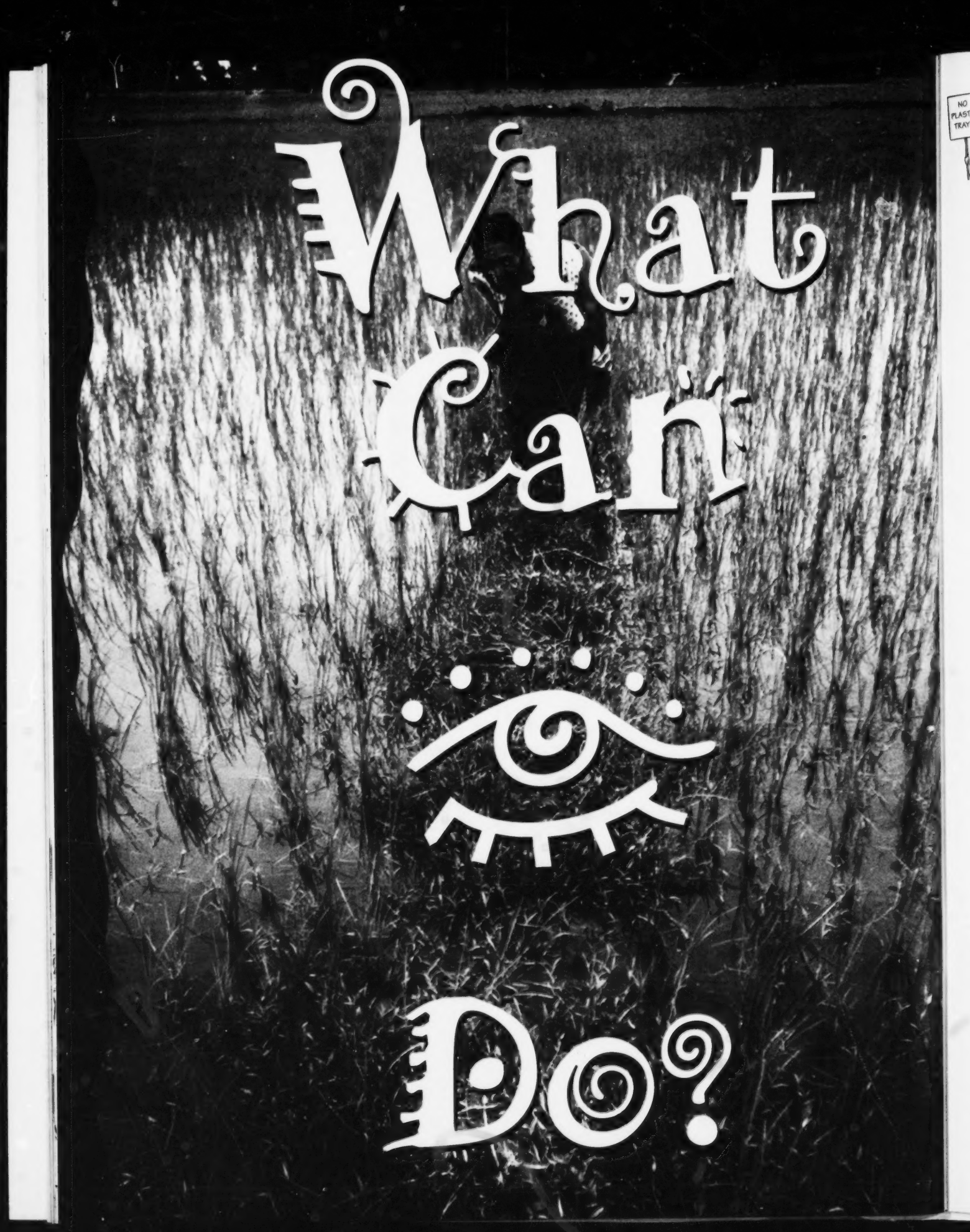
WHAT CAN WE DO?


What
Can
Do?

What Can We Do?

SCHOOLCHILDREN IN SWEDEN HAVE BOUGHT AND PRESERVED 65,000 hectares (almost 160,000 acres) of forest in Costa Rica with money they earned by recycling paper and cans.

AT A SCHOOL IN NEW JERSEY, UNITED STATES, AS A RESULT OF STUDENT protests, disposable plastic trays were replaced with paper trays in the cafeteria.

IN EAST KALIMANTAN, INDONESIA, LOCAL SCOUTS REPLANTED A 1,200-acre forest that was destroyed in a fire.

IN LAMORDE, NIGER, SCHOOLCHILDREN GROW THEIR OWN RICE AND millet in the rainy season and vegetables in the dry season in their own school yards.

Above are a few examples of the projects that schoolchildren around the world have carried out. This section is intended to give you a few suggestions for projects you can start on your own or in your school or community.

SAVING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Use paper wisely. Write on both sides.

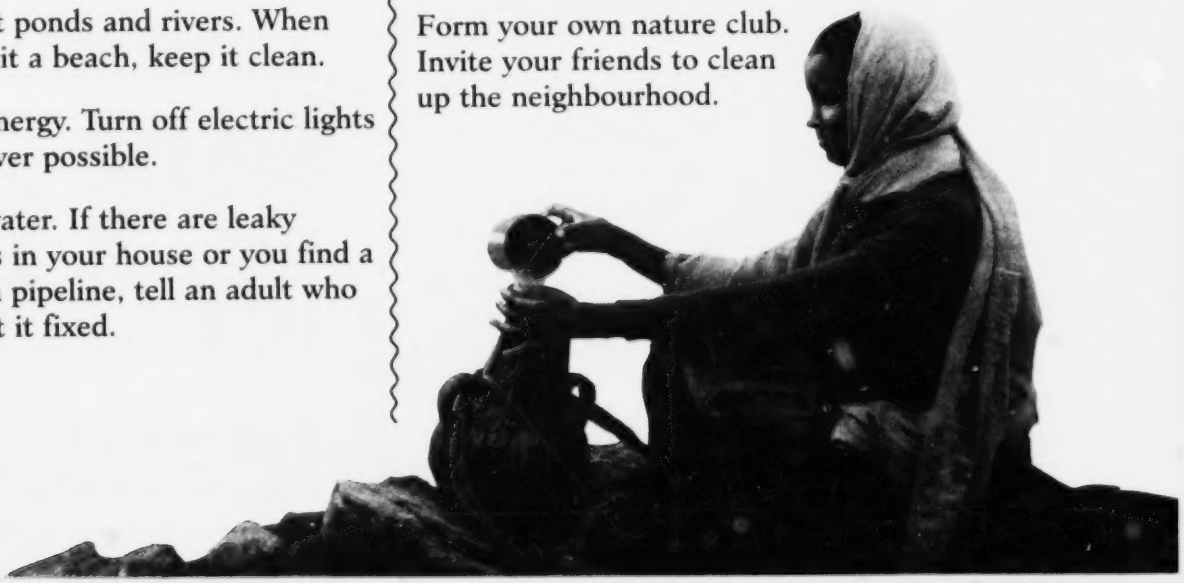
Protect ponds and rivers. When you visit a beach, keep it clean.

Save energy. Turn off electric lights whenever possible.

Save water. If there are leaky faucets in your house or you find a broken pipeline, tell an adult who can get it fixed.

Take care of trees. Plant new ones and protect them from damage.

Form your own nature club. Invite your friends to clean up the neighbourhood.



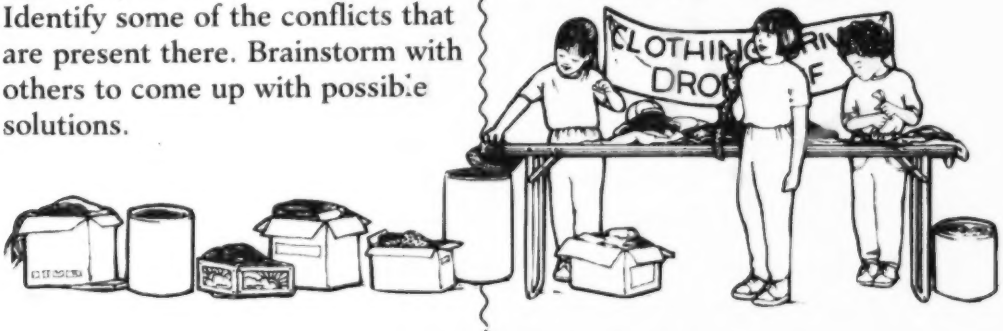
PROMOTING PEACE

READ and learn about conflicts around the world. Discuss possible solutions with your friends and classmates. Write a letter to your President or UN ambassador with your suggestions.

LOOK at your neighbourhood. Identify some of the conflicts that are present there. Brainstorm with others to come up with possible solutions.

HOLD a clothing drive for people in war-torn areas of the world—collect coats, hats, gloves, socks and blankets to help those in need.

CELEBRATE UN Day—October 24—by having a carnival at your school or in your community.



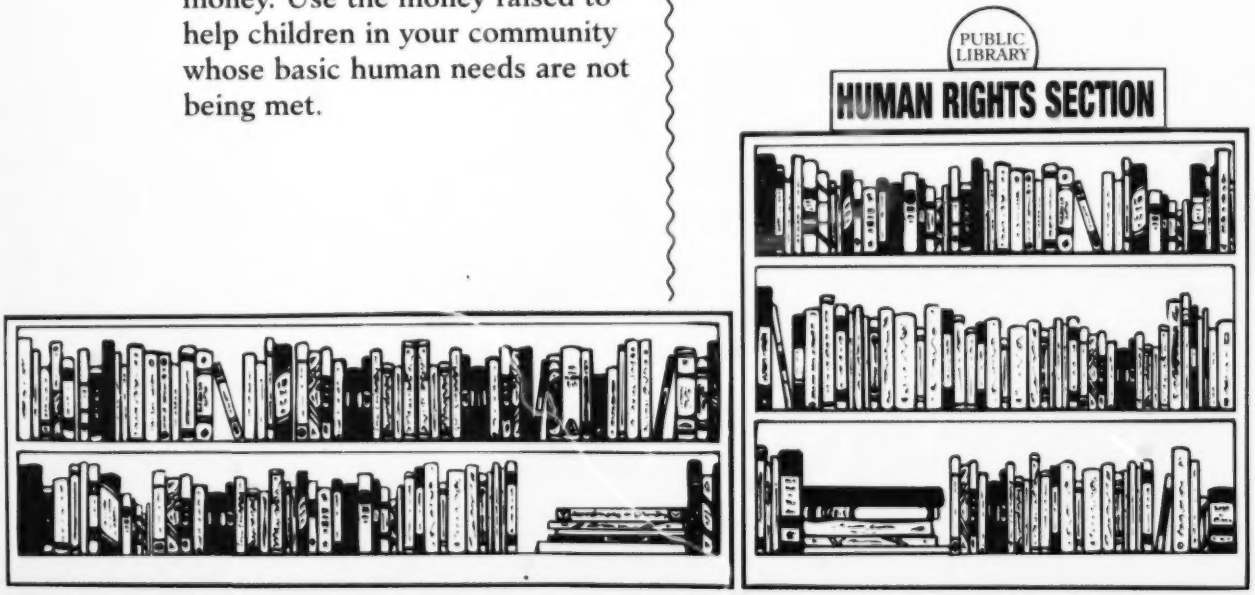
DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

FORM a Human Rights Society.

CONTACT a local hero or celebrity and persuade him or her to help you with a fund-raising event—walkathon, musical event or sports competition—to spread awareness about human rights and to raise money. Use the money raised to help children in your community whose basic human needs are not being met.

PERSUADE your school or local libraries to include more books on human rights.

ORGANIZE a photo or painting exhibition or contest, illustrating different aspects of human rights.



IDEAS FOR UN DAY

IN SCHOOL: You could organize a UN Day celebration by holding a school or classroom meeting. If you have students from different countries, they could wear national costumes, sing national songs or simply share stories from their native countries.

You may also want to **organize a debate** on the UN role in different areas, including peacekeeping, sustainable development and human rights. A **guest speaker** could be invited to speak on your chosen theme. Students could **prepare flags from different countries**, and the library could display books about different cultures. You may also wish to consider doing a special edition of your classroom **wall magazine** or school newspaper.

If you have access to video facilities, ask your teacher to **borrow a film** from the local library or the nearest UN information centre.

Individually, you can also **write letters to local newspapers,** urging greater support for the UN.

IN THE COMMUNITY: Flag-raising ceremonies, conferences and seminars, international music festivals, arts and crafts fairs, book sales and food sales are some of the events traditionally organized to celebrate UN Day.

To coincide with the celebration, your local government might be encouraged to **issue a UN Day proclamation.** Non-governmental organizations might announce a UN Day award for significant contributions to promoting peace and respect for human rights.

Many countries also **celebrate UN Day** by planting trees, collecting books and clothes for the needy and raising funds for international humanitarian help. Sometimes governments celebrate the Day by naming a street or park after the UN and issuing UN Day commemorative stamps and coins.

CONTACT your nearest United Nations office for posters, pictures and booklets. If you do not know where to write, contact UN Headquarters at the following address:

Public Inquiries,
United Nations, GA-57,
New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.,
Tel.: 212-963-4475/9246
Fax: 212-963-0071
E-mail: inquiries@un.org

KEY WORD SEARCH

Circle the key words. What other important words can you find?

R	P	E	A	C	E	O	A	K	M	N	A	S	Q	O
C	E	H	U	M	A	N	R	I	G	H	T	S	S	M
D	K	S	J	L	D	I	S	A	R	M	E	D	N	L
E	B	I	O	F	L	X	R	M	P	F	D	Y	O	N
N	E	L	H	L	I	O	T	U	W	A	N	V	I	A
E	P	A	T	I	U	O	N	S	P	M	I	L	T	I
G	E	N	E	R	A	T	I	O	N	I	U	L	A	R
O	D	O	C	E	N	T	I	M	D	L	G	U	N	A
T	T	I	G	E	N	E	R	O	T	Y	I	A	D	T
I	S	T	F	O	R	U	M	G	N	U	A	N	E	I
A	D	A	R	M	E	D	M	D	E	C	E	N	T	N
T	R	N	O	I	T	N	E	V	R	E	T	N	I	A
E	U	G	O	L	A	I	D	L	D	T	I	O	N	M
Z	N	A	W	R	E	T	H	C	H	I	L	D	U	U
E	N	V	I	R	O	N	M	E	N	T	K	R	S	H

GENERATION
NEGOTIATE
DECENT
PEACE
CHILD
ENVIRONMENT
DISARMED
DIALOGUE
RESOLUTION
HUMAN
UNITED
FAMILY
FORUM
HUMANITARIAN
INTERVENTION
RIGHTS
NATIONS

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The United Nations has a whole range of educational resources for all school levels. From videos to charts to books, UN products offer educators the possibility to focus on a world of issues.

- School kits on the United Nations: three separate kits for primary, intermediate and secondary schools; include texts and activities on a vast range of global issues; formatted for easy photocopying and distribution.
- United Nations flag chart and Flag Kit
- Girls: Challenging the World
- Blue and beautiful: Planet Earth, Our Home
- Introduction to Model United Nations (with video)
- Basic Facts about the United Nations
- World Statistics Pocketbook
- A Common Goal (video)

To place an order for the above publications/videos, please contact:
UN Publications, DC2-853, United Nations, New York, NY 10017, USA; tel. 212-963-8302; fax 212-963-3489; e-mail: publications@un.org; on-line: www.un.org/Depts/pubs

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS ON THE INTERNET

The CyberSchoolBus of the UN website offers a wealth of information, activities and teaching resources designed to engage as well as inform students and teachers alike. It offers comprehensive teaching units on topics such as poverty, health and the state of the world's cities. Complete with activities and project ideas, these units are perfect for busy teachers and home schoolers.

CyberSchoolBus can be accessed at www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus

Why the United Nations? Because it...

Keeps peace: when conflicts erupt, the United Nations provides a forum for negotiation, and, if needed, sends peacekeepers to prevent a crisis from going out of control.

Protects the environment: it brings together Governments to prevent climate change, air and water pollution, extinction of species and many other problems.

Fights poverty: it helps poor countries to help themselves by providing technical and financial support.

Improves health and education: it helps poor countries to provide more and better schools and health services such as vaccination and safe drinking water.

Helps in emergencies: it organizes relief and food supplies for millions of refugees and victims of famine and natural disasters.

Stands up for human rights: it sets international standards for the rights of children, women and minorities.

Builds democracy: it helps countries conduct free and fair elections.

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